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Asia-Pacific Development,
Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue

Options Paper

What does it look like for Australia to be an...

Effective Partner for a Secure and Peaceful Pacific

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DISCLAIMER

Why it matters

There is a **strong sense of insecurity** around the Pacific region. This exists at multiple levels:

- globally, as a warming planet presents ecological and civilisational threats;[1]
- regionally, as players and relationships change, the values and principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and underpinning regional stability since World War Two are under challenge;[2]
- nationally, as countries respond to the effects of COVID-19, natural disasters, illegal fishing, smuggling, transnational crime and other security threats, which are compounded by gender inequality; and
- locally, where community leaders and security agencies struggle to control violence and subnational conflicts in several countries. In some areas, law and order challenges and the proliferation of firearms mean that risks to individual safety and tribal and political violence is extremely real.

For Australia, **stability and peace in the Pacific goes to the heart of its security, prosperity and national interest**. During a historic period of geopolitical change, the signing of a security agreement between Solomon Islands and China in April 2022 has brought geopolitical competition and militarisation in the Pacific to the fore of political and public discussion.[3] There are concerns regarding the potential for Chinese military and security presence, economic coercion and suppression of human rights.

For Pacific island countries, the **key security issue is climate change**, including its impact on human security. In statement after statement, Pacific leaders have described climate change as an existential security threat to their territory, statehood and cultures due to sea level rise and increased frequency of natural disasters. Pacific island countries have often been disappointed by Australia's failure to support – and sometimes efforts to block – international action on climate change and by Australia's reticence in responding to climate change as a security priority.

Pacific leaders have recognised an **expanded concept of security** in the Boe Declaration on Regional Security (2018).[4] In this human security frame, gender equality, is a key area of concern. The Pacific has the lowest levels of women's political representation in the world with just 6% of seats held by women.[5] Rates of gender based violence are amongst the highest in the world.[6]

1. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, 2022, https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg2/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf

2. Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, 2016: https://www.defence.gov.au/about/publications/2016-defence-white-paper; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*, 2017: https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf; Department of Defence, *2020 Defence Strategic Update*, 2020: https://www.defence.gov.au/about/publications/2020-defence-strategic-update

3. Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for International Development and the Pacific, *"Joint Statement on Solomon Islands"*, 19 April 2022: https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/joint-statement-solomon-islands-0

4. This expanded concept includes: "human security, humanitarian assistance, prioritising environmental security, and regional cooperation in building resilience to disasters and climate change". See Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, 2018: https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Boe-Declaration-on-Regional-Security.pdf

5. Inter Parliamentary Union, *Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments*, 2022, https://data.ipu.org/women-averages?month=5&year=2022

6. Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, *Ending Violence Against Women*, 2020, https://pacificwomen.org/our-work/focus-areas/ending-violence-against-women/

This insecurity at the individual level also impacts on national and regional security, with the Asian Development Bank identifying gender inequality as the greatest factor in fragility of Pacific island countries[7] and gender-based violence identified as a key priority in several Pacific countries' national security strategies.[8]

There also remains unfinished business with **independence and decolonisation movements** in the region including in New Caledonia, Bougainville, West Papua and other territories.

This means it is a challenging time for Australia-Pacific security cooperation. Australian policymakers need to **think big to achieve a significant reset in security cooperation**. Bold suggestions should be considered. It is not the time for timid or incremental policy options.

There is a **solid base for security cooperation**. Australia has security cooperation arrangements with the majority of Pacific Island states, ranging from police-to-police cooperation, defence capacity-building and joint military exercises through to development programs designed to address drivers of fragility such as inequality and inclusive economic growth. While there have always been differences in views on security between Australia and the Pacific – and among Pacific island countries themselves – a range of ongoing mechanisms, instruments and institutions facilitate cooperation for peace and security in the region.[9]

But what has maintained peace in the region in the past cannot be assumed to be sufficient in a deteriorating strategic environment. We need to work harder with the Pacific to **respond to drivers of instability** to support a peaceful and secure region in which sovereign states can prevent and respond to threats and coercive influences.

We need to move beyond paying lipservice to each others' security concerns and develop a common framework for security that responds to the **full set of peace and security challenges in the Pacific**. This requires deepening relationships and making sure other security issues and shared concerns are not lost as geopolitical concerns come to the fore.

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7   Asian Development Bank, *Mapping Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations in Asia and the Pacific: The ADB Experience*, 2016: https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/211636/mapping-fcas-asia-pacific.pdf

8   Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe Declaration Action Plan*, 2019: https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/BOE-document-Action-Plan.pdf; Government of Papua New Guinea, *National Security Policy*, 2013: https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2013-PNG-National-Security-Policy.pdf; Government of Solomon Islands, *National Security Strategy*, October 2020: https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/210201-SOLOMONS-National-Security-Strategy-Final_.pdf; Government of Vanuatu, *Vanuatu National Security Strategy: Secure & Resilient*, 2019: https://www.gov.vu/images/publications/Vanuatu_National_Security_Strategy.pdf

9   For more detail see: Joanne Wallis, et al., *Mapping Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands,* 2021: https://dpa.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2021-06/mapping_security_cooperation_in_pacific_islands_dpa_research_report_2021_joanne_wallis_henrietta_mcneill_james_batley_anna_powles.pdf.

Aligning views

AUSTRALIAN VIEWS

Australia, like its Pacific neighbours, is an island nation which **brings strategic strengths but also real vulnerabilities**. Stability and instability in the Pacific is of great strategic and practical significance to Australia.

Historically, Australia has assumed a **sense of responsibility** for the region. This has included military cooperation, acting as a major aid donor, providing capacity-building and supporting regionalism including the establishment of the Pacific Islands Forum. Australia has prioritised support for gender equality initiatives in the region through specific programs like Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, Pacific Women Lead and Balance of Power, as well as by mainstreaming gender equality across development initiatives in the region

Now, closer **links between Pacific island countries and China**, including the recent Solomon Islands security agreement, have revealed issues in quality, resilience and depth of relations between Australia and the Pacific. Communities and leaders in Australia and the Pacific are looking to how these may be strengthened in the interests of long-term stability and peace. Australian policymakers and the public are concerned about the potential for a Chinese military base in the Pacific region and harbour wider concerns that China's coercive influence is becoming sharper and more destructive.

By contrast, up to now Australian policymakers have tended to see **climate change** as a threat multiplier, for example in natural disasters, rather than as a security threat to Pacific lives and livelihoods.

PACIFIC VIEWS

Key Pacific documents on regional security[10] have **an expanded view of security** and set out the key security issues and priorities for the Pacific as including climate change, human security, gender equality, environmental and resource security, transnational crime and cybersecurity.

Despite its cultural and linguistic diversity, Pacific Leaders are united in consistently highlighting the **existential security threat of climate change**. This is reflected in the Boe Declaration on Regional Security (2018) which declares climate change is "the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific."

Pacific island countries are dealing with the **security impact of climate change**, including more regular severe cyclones, changing rainfall patterns, flooding, marine heatwaves, coastal erosion and inundation and coral bleaching. Some of the consequences of climate change – such as migration, land insecurity, loss of livelihoods and disaster damage – are leading to localised conflict and governance crises. This is affecting peace in Pacific societies and has the potential to make any response more crisis-driven, exclusive and potentially more authoritarian. Progress towards United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions" has been mixed.[11]

At the national level, most Pacific island countries have been in the process of **democratic transition**. In some cases, this has been marred by corruption and lack of transparency. Another challenge is the extremely low representation of women in elected bodies such as parliaments. Although it can appear that national government and its institutions have overarching legitimacy and authority, at a local and community level such authority is typically dispersed.

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10   Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, 2018: https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Boe-Declaration-on-Regional-Security.pdf plus associated action plan.

11   Murray Ackman, Andrea Abel van Es and Daniel Hyslop, *Measuring Peace in the Pacific - Addressing SDG16: Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions, Institute for Economics & Peace*, 2018, https://reliefweb.int/attachments/00c60cfe-b0f8-3904-a9b7-e9423d67f6f3/Measuring_Peace_in_the_Pacific.pdf

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This disconnect with national institutions has positive and negative implications for governance, inclusive decision-making and peace and security. For Australian policy-makers and practitioners, this requires additional effort to understand and engage appropriately.

There are pushes for **independence, self-reliance and decolonisation** in various territories in the Pacific and these movements have national and regional ramifications. As shown with past deployments in Timor-Leste, Bougainville and Solomon Islands, Australia may be called on to contribute to peacekeeping and peace-building initiatives as governance and sovereignty transitions or challenges take place.

Pacific leaders are dealing with an **increased number of donors** and bilateral and regional relationships, from New Zealand, the United States, Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere. This has led to a complex and crowded environment and the potential danger of breaking down Pacific collective vision. Some Pacific leaders have indicated that Australia must respect Pacific island countries' decisions to choose security partnerships with non-traditional partners, such as China, and see such moves as part of establishing their countries on a more equal footing with larger countries such as Australia.

Some Pacific island countries have expressed concern about the AUKUS (Australia, UK and US) agreement[12] including Australia's intention to obtain **nuclear** powered submarines. Pacific island countries have a long history of calling for elimination of nuclear weapons and have suffered disproportionately from the testing of nuclear weapons particularly by France, Britain and the US in the northern Pacific. New Zealand and nine Pacific Island Forum member states have ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which Australia has, up to now, opposed in international forums.

In recent years, Pacific governments have been diversifying their aid, trade and political relationships beyond traditional partners like France and the ANZUS allies, to build **South-South partnerships** on issues of concern. Drawing on decades of climate diplomacy – often challenging Australia's reluctance to act with urgency on emissions reductions – Pacific island states have developed new mechanisms to advance their agendas on the international stage, such as the Pacific Small Island Developing States group, which is now part of the Asia-Pacific bloc within the United Nations.

At the regional level, Pacific island countries have a history of **oceanic diplomacy** that is also troubled by fissures (such as a controversial vote for the latest Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General[13]) and diversity of actors and interests. Subregional groups have also become more prominent such as the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) in fisheries; the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) which collaborates on issues such as trade and development; and the Pacific Island Chiefs of Police (PICP).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALIGNMENT

Both Australian and Pacific leaders have long stressed the **importance of strong and enduring relationships** given the interdependence for peace and security. Australia and the Pacific have shared geography, history, engagement in regional institutions and long-standing security relationships. They also share a commitment to upholding international law, the global rules-based order and the associated governance frameworks of the United Nations. There is goodwill towards Australia in the region to draw on.

Australia and the Pacific are generally aligned in **framing security as including human security**[14], with a vision of Pacific people living free from violence and the fear of

12   Greg Fry, *AUKUS undermines Australia's "Pacific family"*, Devpolicy, November 2021: https://devpolicy.org/aukus-undermines-australias-pacific-family-20211104/

13   Gil Rickey, *Micronesia stays in the Pacific Islands Forum fold – for now*, The Interpreter, February 2022: https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/micronesia-stays-pacific-islands-forum-fold-now

14   Pacific Islands Forum, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, 2018: https://pacificsecurity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Boe-Declaration-on-Regional-Security.pdf

violence and "leading free, healthy and productive lives." [15]Australia has supported countries to draft individual national security strategies that recognise broader and longer-term challenges to human security such as gender equality, climate change, natural disasters and cyber security, and clearly articulate the priorities of respective countries. Multisectoral responses that combine efforts from peace, security, gender, development and diplomatic institutions are preferred.

However, within the human security frame, Australia and Pacific island countries **diverge in how prominent certain topics should be**. Australia could align more with Pacific security concerns in its balance of finance, technical assistance, capacity-building, legal and law enforcement engagement, political engagement and diplomacy to support Pacific priorities. Pacific women's organisations have also called for a broader approach to security including decolonisation, climate action and gender equity to address past injustice.[16] Australia can align with this by including Pacific women's perspectives in policy and taking up calls for increased representation of women in security spaces.

Common interests and shared geography should attune parties to building **respectful mutually beneficial relationships**. Having different security perspectives need not preclude regional cooperation,[17] as can be seen in initiatives including the Pacific Maritime Security Program, joint statement on exclusive economic zones and multilateral cooperation on joint monitoring, control and surveillance operations on fisheries to deter and disrupt transnational crime.

Climate change poses challenges towards the definition of maritime boundaries of Pacific island countries as these may change due sea level rise and land degradation. Their response has been to utilise regional solidarity and international activism, particularly under the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), to establish decisions and precedents that can cement Pacific island countries' control over their boundaries over the past 20 years.

Most recently this culminated commitment at the 2019 PIF leaders' meeting for "a collective effort to develop international law with the aim of ensuring that once a PIF Member's maritime zones are delineated in accordance with UNCLOS, that Member's maritime zones cannot be challenged or reduced as a result of sea-level rise and climate change" as stated in the communique.

Supporting regional cooperation on this issue has been the Pacific Islands Regional Maritime Boundaries Project, a collaboration of regional organisations, Australian institutions and Pacific island countries which provides technical support for Pacific island states to clarify the extent of their maritime jurisdictions, including: depositing information about their maritime boundaries with the Secretary-General of the UN; preparing continental shelf submission for the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf; updating maritime zones legislation; and delineating the limits of their maritime zones, including drafting and negotiating maritime boundaries treaties. At least 49 maritime boundaries have been clarified as a result of this project.

1   Rebecca Strating and Joanne Wallis, *Climate change and maritime boundaries: Pacific responses and implications for Australia*, Griffith Asia Institute Regional Outlook, Paper No. 66, 2021, https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0033/1378437/RO66-Strating-and-Wallis-web.pdf

15   Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Consultations on Pacific Islands Forum 2050 Strategy*, October 2020: https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/consultations-pacific-islands-forum-2050-strategy

16   'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likilik, *Creating Equitable and Decolonizing South-North Partnerships: Nurturing the Vā and Voyaging the Audacious Ocean Together*, International Women's Development Agency, 2020, https://iwda.org.au/resource/creating-equitable-south-north-partnerships/; Fiji Women's Rights Movement, *Pacific Feminist Charter Action Plan*, 2019: http://www.fwrm.org.fj/images/PFF/WEBSITE/PFF_Charter_Action_Plan.pdf

17   Sandra Tarte, *Reconciling Regional Security Narratives in the Pacific*, East Asia, 39(1), 2022, pp. 29-43.

"The Pacific Step-up builds on Australia's history of sustained engagement with countries in the Pacific and our shared and abiding interest in the promotion of sovereignty, stability, security and prosperity in the region. In line with the Boe Declaration adopted by Pacific leaders at the 2018 Pacific Islands Forum, Australia is enhancing its security cooperation with Pacific countries, including through expanded ADF training activities, infrastructure development, maritime capability and people-to-people links."

2020 Defence Strategic Update, July 2020

Barriers

There are **power imbalances** that create tension in the relationship between Australia and the Pacific. Due to its dominance in providing funding for the Pacific, with Australia the number one donor providing 35% of all aid to the Pacific in 2019,[18] there is a danger of Australian frameworks being adopted by default rather than addressing development challenges in ways that are respectful, dialogic and mutual.

Diplomatic references to the "Pacific family" are intended to reflect an ideal relationship of cooperation but this does not always ring true. Issues where **Australia is perceived as prioritising its own self-interest** include withholding support from Pacific cooperation on global climate change action and on visa and business access for Pacific citizens.

From Pacific points of view, Australia can **lack policy coherence** in setting positions and agendas and in practice. For instance, Australia's past statements about denuclearisation are now complicated through the AUKUS agreement. Pacific views are often collated and included in consultations by some ministries and departments but then overlooked by other parts of the Australian Government when key decisions are made. Sometimes this is interpreted as Australia not listening to the Pacific, but it should be seen as an issue of conflicting priorities where Australia's global agenda trumps its regional agenda; that is, Australia is aware of Pacific views but then prioritises global strategies.

The lack of **coordination between Australian agencies** can mean Pacific leaders and senior civil servants are burdened by many meetings and seemingly overlapping or conflicting agendas of Australia and other like-minded countries. Approaches are sometimes experienced as ad hoc and driven by specific Australian requests, rather than informed by longer-term policies and plans. This can result in assistance provided that may not be needed, or testing approaches in the Pacific rather than drawing on grounded analysis of what works in local contexts.
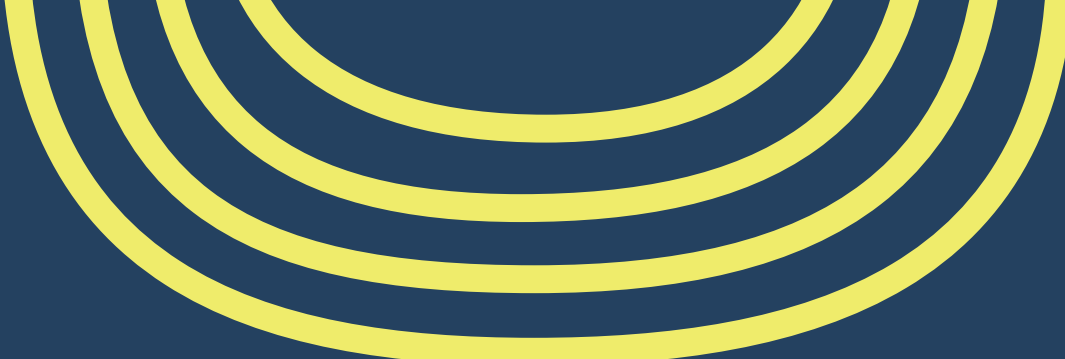
Coordination with other countries is also an issue. The increasing interest in the region by Five Eyes countries plus France and Japan has flagged a level of "competition" for the delivery of assistance. New Zealand has invested significantly in the Pacific, and other partners are ramping up investment, such as increased access to aid and the re-establishment of a US Embassy in Solomon Islands. Australia is not the only regional provider and needs to acknowledge this by aligning with and leveraging off other likeminded countries to make collective efforts meaningful and enduring.

Because security is political, both Australian and Pacific leaders can focus on **short-term political considerations**, which can divert attention away from trends and threats to peace and stability that need longer-term and sustained action. A focus on elected leaders and senior civil servants in consultations can also exclude women, given their lack of representation in these areas, meaning that the gendered drivers of insecurity, and the gendered impacts of security decisions, are not fully understood.

Both Pacific island countries and the Australian Government **lack accountability** on following through the policies and intergovernmental instruments they have signed. There are many good statements of intent, but implementation and review of progress towards security goals is less clear. This is also complicated by small island developing states having to respond to a spectrum of international law issues without the staffing and expertise of larger states. Coordination and sustainability of effort is crucial to support the Pacific for regional security.

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18   https://pacificaidmap.lowyinstitute.org/

"In Papua New Guinea, there is a popular saying – 'where China goes, Australia follows'… it's a reaction… The responsibility lies with Australia in understanding what the Pacific needs are. It's not the other way around… If Australia can address what Pacific island countries think is a security threat, there won't be a need for the Pacific to seek China's help."

Michael Kabuni, Papua New Guinea, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

"We're on different sides about what security is."

Jope Tarai, Fiji, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

"Australia is treating us as an arena of contestation rather than relationship building."

Opeta Alefaio, Fiji, AP4D Pacific Voices Consultation, April 2022

The vision in practice

Australia and Pacific island countries support each other to anticipate, prevent and respond to security threats and coercive influences. They develop a common sense of the threats to peace and security in the region. Australia is not reactive, but insightful; not directing, but reflexive; and not static, but forward-thinking in order to create security with Pacific island countries and regional institutions for a peaceful region.

In a spirit of **strategic humility**, Australia understands that its role is to learn from Pacific island countries' experiences and perspectives to support informed and inclusive decision-making processes in the Pacific through development assistance. While this support comes in different forms, it is linked to strategic plans and policies created by Pacific island countries, individually and together as a region, to be secure and peaceful, which in turn creates peace for Australia and the Pacific alike.

Australian policymakers recognise that it is in **Australia's interest to care about what Pacific island countries care about**. While Australia pursues and discusses its national interests in security, it refers to Pacific interests as its interests and seeks out win-win solutions. Publicly and privately the emphasis is on the shared interests Australia, New Zealand and Pacific island countries have in the Pacific as a region of peace and rule of law. Leadership is distributed and collective.

The **Pacific agenda is a priority** in Australia's broader global agenda and Pacific preferences are not overridden. Australia not only gives weight to the direct bilateral and regional relationships but also gives weight to Pacific interests and concerns in its interactions with other international partners.

Australia envisages Pacific island countries as a network of interrelated activity, interaction, trade, exchange, communication and influence reaching across much of the Pacific Ocean. Strong relationships are not made up only of defence and security ties, and do not come into play only in situations of threat. They are the product of **long-term, consistent and multi-faceted engagement**, of genuine partnership with and respect for countries that are equally sovereign, and exchange that takes seriously the priorities, concerns and values of all the parties.

Australia ensures that it is **not imposing its concept of security** on the Pacific, and Pacific Island states make informed decisions on their own security free of coercive influences. Australia anchors its activities to a meaningful, coordinated and sustainable plan, prioritised by the Pacific countries. At the same time, there is discussion of Australia's security concerns and how Australia defines them. Where national interests between Australia and the Pacific diverge on some issues, the differences are maturely recognised while maintaining relationships.

Australia has a clear understanding of Pacific peace and security at local and regional levels both currently and into the future. Australian assistance to Pacific island countries is **aligned to the priorities of national security strategies** and respect sovereignty and local agendas. Australia recognises that security includes a multiplicity of actors, not just state actors but also the private sector, civil society, women's rights organisations and local governance such as chiefly systems and subnational island groupings. It thus understands that governance must be inclusive, avoiding overly centralised systems exacerbating local conflicts, and directs its efforts accordingly. This deep contextual knowledge includes recognition of the gendered nature of security and the need to ensure women's participation and leadership in security spaces.

Australia's understanding of Pacific island countries means that it **supports capacity-building** of state and non-state actors in the Pacific and conducts regular people-centred, multitrack dialogues and programs including working with civil society, media and subnational governance institutions. In some cases, this support includes development and sovereignty transitions. Australia supports health and education, as key human security concerns, and as a bridge between peoples, including Pacific islanders residing in territories.

Australia's defence establishment has an integral role building capacity to **respond to crises**, both in tools and equipment but also systems, human capital and

consumables like fuel. It supports civilian-led crisis response by delivering coordinated end-to-end sectoral capabilities to agencies who provide a first response to human security issues. Australian assistance works alongside state and local community leaders and groups and respects local forms of social order in its bilateral and multilateral operations.

Australia and the Pacific are working together on **climate and security**. Australia recognises climate change as a key national security threat and a key threat to Pacific island states. Understanding that addressing this threat requires a rapid reduction in global emissions this decade, Australia works with Pacific island countries in key multilateral forums to press for deep emissions reductions by 2030. As part of this recognition of the relation of climate change to Pacific resilience and peace, Australia invests heavily in Pacific-led initiatives, such as the Pacific Resilience Facility and the Group of Friends on Climate and Security at the United Nations.

Australia **invests sufficient diplomatic and political resources** to engage effectively with Pacific island countries, both in the field and in key international forums such as New York and Geneva, where strategic engagement across diverse United Nations and other multilateral settings is important. Diplomatic engagement is based on a long-term strategy and supported by strong coordination and consultation across relevant Australian government stakeholders. Australia's diplomatic relationships with Pacific counterparts are strong and deep and are maintained and cultivated over time. Australia supports strengthened Pacific engagement in multilateral forums, for closer coordination and targeted capacity-building. Australia's support to Pacific island countries enables the strengthening of law based order, and Pacific island countries are now seen using regional and international mechanisms to bolster their own peace and security and negotiating new instruments to fill gaps in cooperation and action to address security threats.

Australia's diplomacy and development assistance to the Pacific has an **increased profile for Indigenous people**, practices, worldviews and organisations – including through a First Nations Foreign Policy. Australia is aware of its own failures in relation to Australia's First Nations and the Pacific and shows a sense of responsibility and humility

to discuss the past and build more equitable relationships in future. This means Australia supports Indigenous forms of mediation, peacebuilding and conflict resolution within the Pacific and funding for indigenous NGOs and networks that build peace in local communities. Most local conflict in the Pacific is resolved nonviolently by local level leaders and actors, including customary governance, women and youth groups and local services. Australia celebrates and resources this source of Pacific resilience.

Australia engages over many years to ensure **Pacific national security strategies** are not just pieces of paper. Some key successes from this process include demonstrated success in the detection, deterrence and disruption of transnational crime through the combined efforts of multi-agency information sharing networks and taskforces; prevention of security incidents; and improved responses by Pacific agencies to broader security threats. This has a positive impact on issues including illegal fishing, logging, drugs and financial crime.

Australia also provides physical resources and capacity-building through **regional forums** that are agency-specific, such as the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, Oceania Customs Organisation and Pacific Immigration Development Community. Support for Australia-Pacific security relationship is bipartisan in most contexts. Australia and Pacific island countries regularly cooperate on joint exercises for humanitarian assistance which helps protect security from short term political agendas or tensions.

Pacific leaders and senior civil servants remark on **an improved tone and approach** by Australian officials and leaders. Pacific people report that Australian agencies coordinate their projects and visits, and that this coordinated approach helps them appreciate the entirety of peace and security issues and responses and acknowledge Australia as an excellent security partner.

Pacific and Australian leaders talk about how security is shared, and while there are still disagreements from time to time on security frames and responses, no one doubts that the Australia-Pacific peace and security **relationship is close and continuing**.

CASE STUDY:

WORKING REGIONALLY, MARITIME AND FISHERIES OPERATIONS[19]

CASE STUDY:

NEW SECURITY MECHANISMS: PACIFIC FUSION CENTRE[20]

Regional maritime and fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance operations and cooperation have a long history in the Pacific, working through regional institutions. In these operations, agencies across national jurisdictions cooperate over a set period to crack down on illegal and unregistered operations in the Pacific ocean. An example is the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) which coordinated a recent operation, Operation Island Chief which covered an area of 18.4 million square kilometres.

The FFA regional team was supported by seven officers from the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, and Australian Defence Force (working remotely due to COVID), provided intelligence gathering and analysis, supplementing targeted information before and during the operation in order to support surveillance activities by Member countries. Australia, New Zealand, France and the United States provided support through aerial and surface surveillance, alongside the FFA Aerial Surveillance Programme aircraft, further enhancing the maritime surveillance coverage during the operation. Twelve ships, eight aircraft and dark vessel detection technology rounded out the assets included in this complex operation. A great deal of the success of the operations has been due to increased local capacity which gives depth in expertise to Pacific security personnel.

The Pacific Fusion Centre is a newly established centre based in Vanuatu that intends to deliver training and strategic analysis against security priorities identified by Pacific Island Forum Leaders in the 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security. Under the guidance of the Pacific Islands Forum Sub-committee on Regional Security, the Centre provides assessments and advice on Pacific regional security challenges, including climate security, human security, environmental and resource security, transnational crime, and cyber security.

The Pacific Fusion Centre will host security analysts from across the Pacific for capacity building and information sharing and cooperation activities. The first cohort of seconded analysts to join the Centre in Port Vila arrive in 2022 and will spend up to six months producing strategic assessments. They will receive training and mentoring opportunities to enhance their analytical assessment skills before returning to their home countries.

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19   Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, *Operation Island Chief continues protection of Pacific from illegal fishing*, August 2021, https://www.ffa.int/node/2605

20   https://www.pacificfusioncentre.org/

Pathways

SUPPORTING PACIFIC-LED REGIONALISM

Australia supports regionalism in the Pacific as valuable in and of itself. This includes support for the Pacific Islands Forum and related regional agencies, particularly for services that can help member countries respond to security, technological and legal developments.

Pacific regionalism remains an imperative, given the greater bargaining power that Pacific island countries can leverage collectively to engage with larger powers and international institutions and the ability to pool resources and cooperate across countries.

RESPONDING TO LOCAL SECURITY AGENDAS

While Australia and Pacific island countries agree on a human security approach, more attention is needed to put this approach into action, working to provide safety at the individual level through to the country level and wider region. Putting the Boe Declaration into practice means a human security approach that reaches out to subnational and non-state groups, women's groups and youth groups to help create peaceful and cohesive societies. This includes:

- Feminist approaches and centering the perspectives of women in decision making, such as supporting Pacific Women Lead and other programs led and staffed by islander women
- Developing a shared feminist foreign policy agenda for the region, which centres Indigenous people, approaches and worldviews, recognises the gendered drivers of insecurity and applies locally owned solutions.
- Social inclusion, acknowledging large youth populations in the Pacific and need to respond to their economic and political imperatives
- A focus on the impact of extractive industry on human security.

National security strategies can anchor how Australia and like-minded countries coordinate and deliver cross-sectoral efforts. Countries can support the Pacific with staffing and resource gaps, but must ensure they are partners that follow security agendas set locally and regionally rather than paternalistic providers.

Australia has invested in support for national security strategies in some countries, whilst others are yet to draft and/or ratify theirs (including Australia itself). As a priority, Australia or its international partners must ensure that Pacific countries continue to have the assistance needed to draft and ratify individual strategies to bring to life the commitments of the Boe Declaration. In the absence of these, there are policies and strategies that should set the priorities for aid and technical support. It is Australia's national interest to maintain good relationships with Pacific island countries by aligning to the priorities outlined in these Pacific strategies.

Partnered multi-agency efforts which deliver the pillars of the national security strategies could provide a more effective, coordinated, and accountable pathway to delivering priority outcomes for Pacific countries. The previous Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and the current Vanuatu Australia Police and Justice Program (VAPJP) provide contemporary examples of how multilateral missions work in a defence, justice and policing context, although there is potential for improvement. Working under unified command, such a model would allow partners from like-minded countries to leverage their own interests through their participation and the provision of relevant capability and financial support. This is a 'big idea' that would reduce existing duplication of effort and respond better to security challenges – but it would require challenging prevailing thinking on program delivery and funding.

Such multi-agency efforts also need to include support for preexisting networks including the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, Pacific Community for Law Enforcement Cooperation and Pacific Fusion Centre to regularise learning amongst Pacific island countries and opportunities for multistate cooperation on policing and security. Joint operations on drugs, money laundering, human trafficking and maritime surveillance which result in prosecutions and increased deterrence are needed for a safe and secure region.

BUILDING INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

Effective cooperation is underpinned by a network of intergovernmental instruments, for example on information-sharing (including sharing of classified information), logistics, defence cooperation and visiting forces arrangements. Australia should review existing instruments between Australia and Pacific island countries to identify gaps and prioritise areas for further work.

Australia can also assist in reviewing gaps in the extent to which Pacific island countries are parties to key international treaties, including on topics such as corruption, transnational crime and money-laundering, and support countries to become parties to them including helping them work through challenges to their becoming parties to particular treaties.

Australia can support more Pacific candidates, particularly women, for roles in international organisations and can encourage the creation of Pacific national groups under the Permanent Court of International Arbitration. It can assist with capacity-building for smaller Pacific nations in legal fields and diplomatic tradecraft to strengthen Pacific island countries' ability to participate effectively in international forums.

CHANGING THE CLIMATE CONVERSATION

Australia must make up for lost time it has spent disagreeing with Pacific island countries on climate change and indicate its seriousness to act and to support Pacific-wide initiatives. Pathways to change the conversation and demonstrate Australia's partnership with the Pacific include:

- Supporting Pacific-led and Pacific-supported climate change initiatives, such as the Pacific Resilience Facility, Green Climate Fund and the Group of Friends for Climate and Security at the United Nations.
- Establish a regional climate risk assessment to examine risks to both Australia and Pacific island countries from climate change

- Support regional 1.5 track dialogues, such as launching a Suva Dialogue for multilateral discussions and to build coalitions for change
- Back collective diplomatic strategy for driving emissions reduction in multilateral forums
- Consider and respond to views on loss and damage reparations coming from the Pacific
- Continued engagement, through regionalism and technical support, to progress Pacific concerns regarding maritime boundaries

SUPPORTING GOOD GOVERNANCE AND OPEN SOCIETIES

Australia continues and expands its investments in civil society, media and other socio-political institutions critical to countering external influence. This includes partnerships with traditional leaders such as chiefs, as well as networks of women and youth leaders and facilitators for inclusive governance that fit local cultural contexts. This needs to be respectful of Pacific sovereignty.

Support to increase women's political participation and representation is critical to enabling good governance and democracy in the Pacific. This must be accompanied by holistic efforts to achieve gender equality and inclusion through changes to norms and institutions.

Strengthening democratic norms and good governance is vital. This includes increased support for journalism, supporting mainstream media as an important source of debate and information in Pacific island countries and their ability to report accurately and safely as well as bolstering online forums for information and debate. Countries that have the pillars of peace – such as well-functioning governments, low corruption and strong connections between government and societal forms of governance – have higher resilience to counter threats.

Security agencies can also cooperate to improve accountability of staff and institutions, for example Australia can provide support for security vetting systems to help build a secure and trusted Pacific government workforce, and support efforts for intelligence sharing across borders about persons of interest or with criminal convictions.

Coordinated technical assistance for telecommunications and infrastructure for Pacific island countries to set the terms for investment, including assessing offers and setting terms in line with Pacific needs, can also contribute to infrastructure which connects people and institutions and promotes information sharing.

PEOPLE-CENTERED APPROACH

Strong relationships are built by interest in and understanding of other societies and extensive networks of people-to-people links. Greater understanding by Australia and Pacific island countries of each others' security concerns can be built through pathways that recognise and value relationships between people:

- Investment in Pacific literacy in Australia, building cultural understanding, language, better appreciation of divisions and shared chapters in our history
- Promote education, civil society and peer-to-peer linkages to increase knowledge of the Pacific among Australians for more mutual relationships where each understands the other
- Enhanced movement of Pacific people to and from Australia, including examining options for pathways to citizenship, and increased economic flows in both directions.

A FOCUS ON MEDIATION AND PEACEBUILDING

Structural changes to Australian assistance and institutions could create more capacity for conflict resolution, mediation and peacebuilding. This could include restoring the Conflict and Fragility team or setting up a Peace and Conflict unit within DFAT which would provide expert advice and services such as mediation and conflict resolution, while directly supporting mediation and peacebuilding initiatives within the region. Such services may be particularly valuable in cases such as secessionism and independence movements. The unit could also provide services to regional organisations when required. These efforts should also be aligned with the Women Peace and Security Agenda which emphasises the need for women's participation in peacebuilding processes.

While it is a politically sensitive issue, Australia needs to look ahead strategically to plan for any potential transition by Pacific territories to new political status. This would focus on the building blocks required to support peaceful transition, including capacity building programs such as scholarships, technical assistance, medical training, information-sharing, volunteer programs (especially in English language teaching), politics and other initiatives.

CASE STUDY:

SUPPORTING PACIFIC VISIONS, NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGIES[21]

CASE STUDY:

CONNECTED ISLANDS, CONNECTED SECURITY PERSONNEL[22]

Four Pacific island countries (Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands) have completed national security strategies with funding and technical assistance from Australia. National security strategies differ across countries, but many threats are common to all, while each strategy has a context specific analysis of the security environment, current local capabilities, and gaps and actions needed. The strategies give governments and partners tools to prioritise and deliver actions and work more cohesively, with a whole of government approach, to allocate resources.

National security strategies are an example of how Australia can support sovereign decisions of Pacific island countries to identify security threats and concerns and enable appropriate responses. These strategies have become even more prescient as Pacific countries grapple with COVID-19 health, economic and security impacts.

Pacific regional organisations and partners have supported specific networks and regularised contact between security personnel across national borders. These are important forums for learning from each other and identifiying opportunities for cooperation across Pacific island countries to prevent and address security threats. The Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP) convene regularly and run projects on issues of joint interest such as preventative policing, cyber safety, gender and policing, family violence and transnational crime. This has been running for over fifty years with the support of various partners and is hosted by New Zealand Police at their headquarters in Wellington. The group also has the Pacific Community for Law Enforcement Cooperation (PCLEC) that supports capability development in law enforcement priority areas as directed by PICP and involves Pacific security personnel and support from the Australian Federal Police.

21 Tim George, *Strategies for a safer Pacific: can national security strategies make the region more secure?*, Australia Pacific Security College, May 2021: https://pacificsecurity.net/strategies-for-a-safer-pacific-can-national-security-strategies-make-the-region-more-secure/

22 https://picp.co.nz/
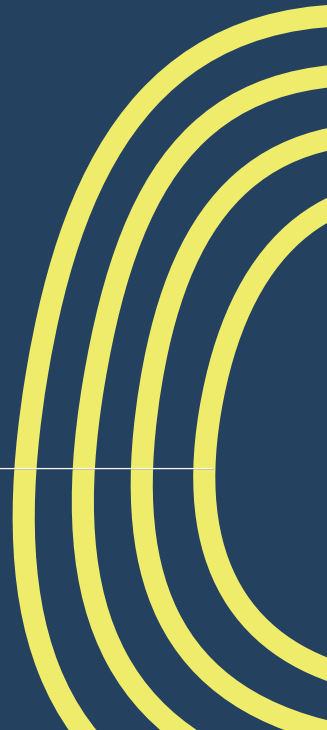
"As one of many Pacific Island nations, Australia is historically and indelibly linked to its neighbours in the region. Our shared history of endurance and mutual assistance during times of major international conflict, natural disaster, climate change and pandemic has forged strong links between Pacific Island neighbours which go beyond statehood and diplomacy. Our people-to-people links, forged over centuries with our Pacific Island family, is at the core of this deep understanding, and defence relationships play a significant role in creating and maintaining this unique connection."

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Inquiry into
Australia's defence relationships with Pacific Island nations, March 2021

"The interplay of different security challenges has long been appreciated in the Pacific. Recently, it was highlighted by Pacific Island leaders' 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security which defined an 'expanded concept of security'. Climate security was recognised as the primary threat to regional security, but other security concerns were also noted – human security, environmental/resource security, traditional security (transnational crime, cyber security, and border protection). The complex interplay between these security challenges and limited resources raises the need for regional and national cooperation to build resilience."

Meg Keen, Security through a Pacific lens, ANU Press, February 2021.

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